Sugar Burn

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Sugar Burn

by BelladonnaWyck, raiast

Summary

It's ill-advised for Will to be drinking and yet he's well on his way to what he hopes will be blackout levels of drunk by morning. It's not like he's on watch tonight, anyway, that's Bev's job. She's up on the wall with Rick and Daryl, and Will feels safe as houses with those three looking out on the wall and Michonne and Hannibal roaming the streets. Though he'll never admit it to Hannibal that anything about the man makes him feel safe.

Notes

Day 5 of AU_Gust Prompts is: Post Apocalypse

We have for you some tentative trust and first kisses! (And a fluff ball named Willow who is THE BEST)

See the end of the work for more notes

It’s ill-advised for Will to be drinking and yet he’s well on his way to what he hopes will be blackout levels of drunk by morning. It’s not like he’s on watch tonight, anyway, that’s Bev’s job. She’s up on the wall with Rick and Daryl, and Will feels safe as houses with those three looking out on the wall and Michonne and Hannibal roaming the streets. Though he'll never admit it to Hannibal that anything about the man makes him feel safe.

He’s only finished a quarter of the whiskey they’d scavenged a few days ago when he hears rustling and shuffling feet from the front porch. He clenches his fingers around the neck of the bottle, prepares to use it as a weapon.

His stomach shouldn’t drop like it does, the threat of Walkers this side of the wall nearly impossible, and yet his insides feel like they’re crawling up through his throat as he steps to the window to look outside.

His sigh of relief is hard enough that it stirs the drapes, and he opens the front door even before the condensation from his breath has disappeared from the window.

“You scared the fuck out of me, Michonne. What are you *doing* here?” He doesn’t mean for it to come across as harshly as it absolutely does, but his heart is still beating an erratic rhythm against his ribs and he’s reeling from the sudden spike in adrenaline.

Michonne just smiles, she’s happier these days and Will is happy to see it. More trusting than she had been when she’d first arrived, road worn and weary. She’s also painfully pregnant, and he feels a pang of jealousy that’s quickly followed by shame knowing he’s in his house trying to get wasted while she’s out protecting them all. It seems as though she’s done nothing *but* protect Alexandria ever since she and her group arrived.

Will and Hannibal had made it several months before Michonne’s ragtag group. They’d lost Jack and Alana along the way, but Bev, Price, and Zeller had all made it, and those are odds Will is willing to accept nowadays when every day is up to chance and nothing is promised. Alexandria is better than the government camp they’d stayed in for the first year until it had been infested with Walkers, and it is certainly better than roaming the woods and empty highways from DC.

“Hannibal told me to go home. I decided to come get you along the way. Doctor’s orders be damned.” There’s something glinting in her eyes that Will can’t quite place, even his profound empathy unable to decipher Michonne’s inner thoughts or motivations if she doesn’t desire it. She’s always been wonderfully closed off to him in a way even Hannibal with all the winding halls and pathways of his mind palace can’t be. It’s refreshing, except when it’s infuriating like now.

“What are you up to, ‘chonne?” He peers at her and she peers right back, a small smile twisting her lips up. She’s beautiful, he thinks to himself, and glowing in the stereotypical way only heavily pregnant women are capable of.

“Go finish the first watch with Hannibal. It’ll be time for shift change soon and you can come back home and finish your party of one.” She gives a meaningful glance to his whiskey

bottle, still three-fourths full, and turns on her heel before he can reply.

He's fairly confident in his abilities - being raised by a high-functioning alcoholic like Beau only raises one's tolerance to the bottle and instills a deeply-ingrained sense of *fuck it, I'll just do it drunk,* after all - so he retrieves his beretta from the sidetable by the front door, double-checks the clip, and then makes his way out to the streets.

Michonne had pointed him in the direction of the south gate before she'd sauntered off into darkness in the direction of her own home, so Will heads that way, feet trekking lightly over the inky tar of the paved street, eyes peering into darkness they've not quite adjusted to. He's about a dozen feet away from the fence when he sees the gate is cracked open - highly unusual in *any* circumstance, but especially in the dead of night - and his feet still momentarily before he begins to slowly edge closer, gaze and weapon swinging in a 180 arc from side to side.

Nothing else appears out of the ordinary, no people, no Walkers. No noise whatsoever, in fact, until he draws even closer to the ajar gate and catches a faint, low whistle. He pauses again, and the silence that falls momentarily is heavy, thick as the stuffy, humid summer air. And then, a soft clicking, a wet tongue against teeth, tapping out sound in a rapid burst before falling silent once more. Will reaches the gate, grip ready on his pistol, and peers around the edge.

Hannibal is sitting in the middle of the road, right out in the open, the *idiot,* and Will might have moved to scold him, to ask him just what the *fuck* he thinks he's doing, putting his safety and everyone else's at risk, and then he catches a flash of movement at the treeline near the left side of the road, where Hannibal's body is angled.

Another faint, beckoning whistle and then, so softly and gently it makes Will's heart clench, "Come here, darling. That's right. It's okay."

The shape at the edge of the trees shifts again, plods forward, and as soon as it reaches the actual road the moonlight shines down fully upon it to reveal the sharper edges of its shape. It's a dog.

It's a *puppy.*

And Hannibal is sitting in the middle of the road, desperately trying to cajole it closer.

He startles when someone comes to stand beside him, nearly yells out - would have, if not for the hand that clamps over his mouth. His wide eyes find Michonne's in the darkness, his covered lips twisting into a smile when he realizes that the bundle she's pushed into his hands is some leftover sausage.

"Had some extra," she murmurs softly and, when Will only raises a skeptical eyebrow at her reasoning, pulls her lips into a smirk. "Make sure you save some whiskey for me."

It's a fair enough trade, so he nods and Michonne slips away into the darkness once more. His steps are confident but slow, measured, and Hannibal doesn't seem surprised at all when Will comes to settle on the ground beside him. The puppy, what appears to be a young, fluffy

golden retriever in desperate need of a bath stills in its steps, head cocked to the side as it takes in its new company. Will clicks his own tongue softly, breaks off a small piece from a link of sausage and tosses it out to the edge of the road.

He hands Hannibal another link, and he mirrors Will's actions, expertly aiming the next bite of food just a few feet closer than the first.

"This isn't a project I'd thought to find you absorbed in," Will whispers, conscious of making any noise that might scare off the puppy. When Hannibal doesn't respond, Will adds, "It's not very safe, being out here. Keeping the gate open."

"Is your faith in my abilities so lacking?" Hannibal murmurs, tossing out another piece. Will's eyes dart to the side to study him, his stomach twisting when he sees the small smile that graces Hannibal's lips when the dog takes the bait and moves closer still.

"In your *abilities?* Not at all. It's your *motive* I usually take umbrage with. You've not set a precedent of being particularly *selfless."*

"It's not unusual for one to have a change of heart," Hannibal points out.

Will scoffs at that, winces when the puppy startles at the sudden noise and backs up several feet. Still, its eyes are trained upon the two of them, as though it fully understands the meal it's been receiving in bits and pieces has been coming directly from them. Will tosses out another piece of meat, heartened when the dog moves forward to accept it and then forward again several more steps.

"Not unusual for *some,* maybe," Will amends, sure to keep his voice low and light, even with how heavy the topic of conversation is between them. "You're not like everyone else, though, are you, Hannibal?"

"I'd argue that you aren't, either."

Will doesn't have a chance to snap back at that, because then Hannibal extends the remains of his sausage, and Will can only hold his breath when the tiny creature decides to venture forward to sniff out the offering before ultimately accepting it. Hannibal relinquishes the bite to the small jaws of the puppy and then deftly scoops it up to settle in his lap as it busies itself with chewing up its prize.

He watches as Hannibal's hand strokes the puppy's head, down its back and flanks, unmindful of whatever mess it's covered in. He watches the steady, gentle movements and wonders how many people met those hands expecting that sort of kindness only to find pain and death.

He wants to tell Hannibal to just let the poor thing go. To leave it to its own devices and agency, like a decent person would, instead of pulling it into his own cruel, calculated machinations. He wants to tell him that the dog isn't *him,* that showing this lonely, pitiful creature kindness and love that only masks ulterior motives for his own amusement isn't the way to make someone *stay.*

Instead, he feeds the little thing the last of the sausage in his own hand, and then joins Hannibal in his petting. He doesn't think about the heat of Hannibal's hand near his own, nor the buzz that shivers through him when their fingers inevitably collide in soft, matted fur.

They can't stay long this side of the wall so late at night, but Will finds himself hesitant to break the tentative quiet peace they've managed to find. He rises to his feet silently, dusting off his dirty palms and leaning down to scoop the puppy from Hannibal's lap. "Are you gonna name her?"

"I first saw her a few days ago out by that grove with the lone willow tree in the center. I caught her running into the brush and couldn't find her again until tonight. Willow seems as apt a name as any." Hannibal stands up too, running his fingers one final time through the puppy's matted, filthy fur and smiling as she wriggles into his touch. So easily domesticated, Will thinks. So easily broken by the whims and kindness of a serial killing cannibal. She'll fit right in.

They walk in silence back to the house, Will shouldering open the front door and taking the puppy - Willow - straight to the kitchen to heat up some water for a bath.

They don't have much in the way of soap, but there's a bottle of nearly empty dish soap Will had found under the cabinets when they'd first arrived that he pulls out and pours into the water, stirring it around to create a sudsy film he can clean her with.

"It seems almost cruel to take her in. What can we offer her that she wasn't already fully capable of on her own out there? In here we have enemies from all sides. She'll be in danger."

"She was in danger outside the wall as well. At least here she'll have companionship and relative comfort and security. She'll not know the perils of traversing the world alone."

"Jack wasn't alone, and he still fell victim to *peril,"* Will tries not to speak, tries to keep the words caught behind the cage of his teeth, but they force themselves out without his approval. "Alana wasn't." His traitorous tongue tacks on unhelpfully, and he keeps his eyes focused on the puppy, methodically working his fingers through the knots in her fur as he cleans her.

"Will -" Hannibal begins, and Will *can't.* He can't stand to hear another excuse. Another platitude that Hannibal thinks Will wants to swallow down.

"Don't. Don't tell me they're no longer suffering. Don't tell me we're strong for surviving this long or for surviving their loss. It's bullshit, Hannibal."

Hannibal is silent for so long that Will thinks he's left, forces himself to look up from his task to see Hannibal leaning against the far wall and looking off into the middle distance, his mind somewhere else.

"If I could take Alana's place, Will, I would. If only to die knowing you would be free and whole again. That you could reclaim the piece of yourself you lost before we even left Baltimore. I would do it gladly."

Will *whimpers,* unable to keep the sound held inside because he *knows* Hannibal is telling the truth. He knows it in the way he knows the moon pulls the tides or that the Earth is round. It's a simple, unignorable fact of life.

He knows that Hannibal is telling the truth, but it's one he doesn't want to hear. Because even after everything, after all the manipulations and lies, shuttering away his true self and acting as Will's loyal friend and helpful psychiatrist, planning all along to keep Will sick, set him up, *frame him for murder* -

Will doesn't want to think about Hannibal not being alive. Not being *with him,* even if it's only to exist in this strange ceasefire of trust they'd been forced to fall into when everything *began.* He doesn't want to think about Hannibal taking the place of Alana or Jack, because even if, on paper, they are clearly the ones more deserving of the chance to survive, Will knows with a bone-deep, gut-wrenching certainty that he would never make the trade.

And he *really* doesn't want to think about *that.*

"Reclaim the piece you tried to take?"

"You may not see it now, Will, but I assure you, every one of my actions stemmed from an earnest desire to help you."

Will huffs out a soft scoff, turning his attention back to Willow as she begins to squirm in his still hands. "To relish my darkest desires rather than fear them? Slacken the lead and let the monster loose?"

"To understand that you and the monster are not separate entities. To allow you to accept yourself, and everything you're capable of." Hannibal is closer when he speaks, and Will stares resolutely at the sodden pup in the sink before him, taking painstaking care to keep the water out of her eyes as he rinses the suds from her coat.

"To accept *you,"* he counters, but the fight has already left him, and his voice is soft.

He's so tired of fighting. Day in and day out, all of life is one big *fight* these days. Fight to eat, to drink, to live and breathe. Fight to feel safe, to feel connected to another person, even as he wonders if *they* might betray him as well.

Knowing Hannibal hasn't done Will's already deeply ingrained trust issues any favors.

"The desire to be accepted, to be *seen* by another person, is an instinctual yearning as old as time."

Will doesn't scoff, but it's a near thing, and he sees Hannibal stiffen slightly from the corner of his eye.

"I *know you,* Hannibal." Will doesn't mean for his voice to sound so accusing, but his throat feels thick with too many unspoken words, too many pushed down emotions. It's been two years since Will's arrest and it feels like an albatross he's carried around his shoulders this entire time, heavy and pointless.

“Knowing and seeing are not the same, dear Will. And neither necessarily begets *acceptance.”*

The doctor is at his side, the heat of him pressing into the scant space between them, into Will, as though he can control the aura around him with a mere thought. Will’s eyes fall to the bath towel in his outstretched arms, too much of a coward to meet Hannibal’s gaze, and then he scoops a shivering Willow up and deposits her into Hannibal’s grasp.

Will watches as Hannibal shifts her in his arms, wrapping her in the towel and supporting her in the crook of one arm while his free hand gently rubs her dry. He doesn’t know when they turned to each other, only realizes with a sharp and brief spike of anxiety that the dog is the only thing separating them. Will swallows hard around the lump in his throat, pulls his eyes up and up, until Hannibal’s bore into his, intense but soft. Inviting. *Yearning.*

“I see you,” Will tells him, and he doesn’t know why it comes out as a gruff whisper, so overly dramatic that he feels an instant flush of embarrassment when he realizes how appropriate the declaration would be on some shitty daytime soap opera.

He takes comfort when Hannibal’s voice is just as raspy, just as thick. “And?”

Will straightens his spine, making certain he won’t crush the puppy between them, and leans forward.

Will shouldn't be surprised to discover Hannibal’s lips are the softest thing about him.

End Notes

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'Til next time! 💚 💜 BellaRai

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